

Sunday School

PAUL A PRISONER—THE PLOT.

October 10, 1909. Acts 23: 11-24.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in Him will I trust." Psalm 91:2.

DAILY HOME READING.

M.—Acts 22: 30 and 23: 11. Thur.—Phil. 3: 1-14.

T.—Acts 23: 12-22. F.—Luke 21: 10-19.

W.—Acts 23: 23-35. S.—Psalm 27.

S.—Psalm 91.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 76. Which is the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment is, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

God gives Paul assurance. Verse 11.

The conspiracy formed against him. Verses 12-15.

The conspiracy providentially discovered. Verses 16-22.

Paul's safe conduct to Felix. Verses 23, 24.

LESSON COMMENTS.

Introductory.—The twenty-second chapter records the speech of Paul on the stairs. He delivered it in the Hebrew language to the angry crowd before him. He graphically told of his birth, rearing, education, morals, persecuting spirit, conversion, call to the ministry, baptism and mission to the Gentiles. The mob then demanded his death; and as he was being bound, he pleaded his rights as a Roman citizen; and the next day was liberated and allowed to make his defense before the council. Perceiving that there were Pharisees and Sadducees present, he, by a fine stroke of policy, cried out that he was a Pharisee, and thus divided their attention, and a controversy at once arose between these two sects. The Pharisees exonerated him but he, being in danger of bodily injury, was forcibly removed to the castle by the Roman authorities. After such exciting experiences, he needed the sweet assurances of His Lord's presence and help.

Comment.—Perseverance in holy living and witnessing primarily depends upon the communications of God's grace to us, and not upon our use of the means of grace, or strength of character. No gracious principle or disposition is in itself indestructible. It must be constantly fed with the oil of divine grace (Zech. 4: 12). The Lord Jesus prepared the apostle for further testimony and suffering by words of cheer. The Lord of glory can illumine the darkest night of trial, ignorance or sorrow. His presence enabled Paul and Silas to sing and pray in the prison at Philippi. Christ Himself was the faithful and the true witness. Paul had given his testimony concerning Christ in the holy city, and his Lord strengthened every spiritual fiber of his being for witness-bearing in Rome. All true believers are the representatives of Jesus Christ on earth.

Very soon the faith, courage and fidelity of the noted prisoner were tested. The Jews conspired to take his life. Forty of them resolved that they would not eat nor drink until they had destroyed him. So they went to the Sanhedrim and revealed their plans to the authorities. "We have here a specimen of that fanatical, yet conscientious, zealotry, which ultimately brought about the downfall of Jerusalem. We learn from Josephus that this bigoted and sanguinary zeal was gradually ripening for years before the great catastrophe." They asked that body to request Lysias to bring Paul down from the tower, as if they wished to hear him again, and they were ready to dispatch him before he came within the place of assembly. "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth" (Ps. 37: 12). Judas conspired against Jesus, and Saul secretly planned David's death. "Sinners in the hands of an angry God, and yet plotting against His children. Poor souls, thus to run upon the point of Jehovah's spear."—Spurgeon.

But the conspiracy was providentially discovered. The secret devices of men and devils can not frustrate God's plans. The Lord had told Paul the night before that he was to bear witness in Rome; and neither human nor angelic

foes could prevent him from executing God's purpose. Paul's sister's son heard the plot and went into the castle of Antonia and informed Paul. The apostle at once called a centurion and asked him to take the young man to Lysias, as he had some important news for him. The centurion acceded to Paul's request, and the young man informed the chief captain of the conspiracy of the Jews to kill the prisoner, whenever a suitable occasion offered. He urged Lysias to refuse to allow Paul to go to the Sanhedrim the next day, and mentioned the details of the plan to take the apostle's life, as he had heard them. Lysias then dismissed the young man, after charging him to say nothing about giving him the information. He at once commanded two centurions to take two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, and conduct Paul, at nine o'clock at night, to Felix at Caesarea. The plans of the assassins therefore failed, and the valuable life of the apostle to the Gentiles was saved.

Doctrinal and Practical.—1. The companionship of Jesus encourages the heart and makes us cheerful in trials. Christ does not promise us exemption from tribulation in this world, but He does promise us good cheer (John 16: 33). The Christian's sources of happiness are too deep to be affected by the world, the flesh and the devil. The joy of the Lord is his strength (Nehemiah 8: 10). The best people sometimes fail or become discouraged, but Jehovah Jesus never does (Isaiah 42:4). The presence of the Son of God protected Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Henry Martyn, in Persia, and David Livingston, in Africa, could die happily almost alone, with God as their Comforter. In an hour of depression, Luther used to say to Malancthon: "Come, Philip, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm."

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,

I will not—I will not desert to his foes;

That soul—though all hell should endeavor to shake,

I'll never—no, never—no never, forsake."

2. Christian people should not expect to prosecute their work undisturbed. The agents of Satan will strive to hinder it and defeat their plans. The wicked one has emissaries in all parts of the world who plan the downfall of Christian leaders by conspiracy, slander, opposition and deception. Absalom conspired against his own father, and the brothers of Joseph against him. Daniel was one of the three men whom God mentioned as noted for his righteousness (Ezekiel 14: 14), and yet the presidents and princes of the kingdom of Persia conspired against him. Fidelity to duty and nobility of character are no guarantees against the plots of the wicked. The causes of temperance, Sabbath observance, education, purity, municipal reform and religion all have their foes that secretly and openly oppose their progress. "The Romans, a brave and generous people, disdained to practice treachery towards their avowed enemies. Christianity teaches us to forgive injuries, but to resent them under the disguise of friendship and benevolence argues a degeneracy at which common humanity and justice must blush."

3. God's purposes and His providences always agree. It was God's plan for Paul to go to Rome, and in his wise providence, the conspiracy against him failed. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Isa. 54: 17). The wickedness of the conspirators frequently returns upon their own heads. Absalom was slain. Haman was hanged on his own gallows. Those who planned the destruction of Daniel were devoured by the lions. God can take care of His people. Golden Text.

4. Boys and girls may be useful in the causes of righteousness and religion. How we should try to win and keep the boys in the Sunday-school and church! Many of them are to be our future ministers, elders, deacons, members and citizens. "In his college religious work, Professor Drummond always sought to win for Christ strong, athletic, popular young men, the leaders, no matter how wild they were, and his sagacity always proved itself."

5. God overrules the powers that be for the accomplishment of His purposes. Lysias saved Paul's life. God raised up Pharaoh to carry out His will (Romans 9: 17). Commodore Perry opened Japan, and Admiral Dewey, the Philippines, to Protestantism.

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